

Israel Builds Boats to Counter Egyptians' Missile-Firing Craft

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HAIFA, Israel, Jan. 8—The Israeli Navy has come up with its answer to the Egyptian missile-firing Komar-class gunboat that sank the destroyer Elath three months ago.

It is rushing production of a "substantial number" of fast boats of Israeli design that it contends can outsee, outmaneuver and outshoot the Russian-designed Komars.

The new vessels, though fairly small, are said to be able to detect and destroy enemy submarines, planes and large warships in addition to missile boats.

Authoritative sources here say that the boats should enable Israel to maintain "qualitative superiority" over the United Arab Republic's Navy for some time to come.

While unwilling, for security reasons, to state the number of the boats that will come out of Israeli shipyards, the military sources were willing to discuss some details of the new type of vessel.

Well before the sinking of the Elath Sept. 21 by Styx missiles, a high-ranking source said, the Israeli Navy realized that its small force of World War II destroyers, submarines and torpedo boats was hardly a match for the combined Arab navies, and particularly, the United

"There really was no ship in anybody's navy that really met our needs," the source said.

"So we're going to come out with a brand new surface force, tailor-made to our requirements. There's nothing quite like it in any other navy. The over-all design is not that different, but the integration of various systems is quite original."

The closest thing to the new vessels, he said, is the new PGM class of aluminum-hulled patrol boats produced by the United States a few years ago as an answer to the Komar class boats supplied to Cuba.

The PGM-class craft have a top speed of 50 knots, 10 knots faster than the Komar class, and are designed to maneuver close and sink the enemy vessel with automatic gunfire or torpedoes. They are small—165 feet over-all—and fast enough to be a very difficult target for the Styx missiles carried by the Komar boats.

The new class, the Israeli source said, will have a speed of "well over 40 knots," and will mount three 40-mm. guns, two side launchers for 21-inch torpedoes and other classified

weapons. The boats, called the Saar class—Saar is the Hebrew word for tempest—would weigh 240 tons fully loaded, compared with the 75-ton Komar boat.

The crew will number 30 against 28 for a PGM boat. Israeli sources conceded that this indicated the inclusion of a large variety of complex radar, electronics and modern weapons systems.

Development Predicted

"In a way, it is not difficult to foresee the development of the Egyptian Navy for years ahead," an Israeli planner said. "They depend so completely on the Russians that we merely have to see what the Russians are building and figure five or six years later to see it in the Egyptian Navy."

While Israeli sources declined to detail the composition of their navy, the usually well-informed Institute for Strategic Studies in London gives the following breakdown as of June 30, for the Israel and Egyptian navies:

Israel: Four submarines, two destroyers (including the Elath), one frigate, one coasta escort, two landing craft and 11 motor torpedo boats of under 100 tons.

United Arab Republic: eight destroyers, eight submarines, six escort vessels, six coasta escorts, five Komar-class and seven Osa-class missile boats, 10 minesweepers, 40 torpedo boats of under 100 tons, and six medium landing craft.

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